

107. Joanna Ward: Bulldog Since Birth

Gavin Kelly

Hey everybody. You're listening to beyond 1894 this is the official podcast of Louisiana Tech University. We are joined today by Miss Joanna Ward. She is an associate professor of health informatics. She's a friend of mine. We were able to connect through the Louisiana Tech Leadership Institute, which I mean, a couple years ago now. It seems like it was not that long ago, but it was. Joanna. Thank you for being here with us today.

Joanna Ward

Well, Gavin, thank you for the opportunity, and I am honored to be here and speak about what we've got going on in health informatics and just about this incredible university that I'm blessed to work for every day.

Gavin Kelly

You know you say you're blessed to work here. I think also it works both ways. I think congratulations is in order. Recently, at the start of the year, during faculty staff convocation, you were given the faculty advisor award. I know that that's probably very fulfilling for you to receive, and it means a lot, but talk to me about kind of what it means, because that's an award that you know, the students that you advise are responsible for, sort of making that happen. So through the University Senate, you were given that faculty advisor award. Talk to me about that. Yes,

Joanna Ward

I was just completely honored, privileged. I have got amazing students that I get to share time with during advising, and I love the fact that we're moving towards holistic advising. I had the pleasure of serving on the the Quality Enhancement Plan, and was on one of the test or focus groups, and they were like, what do we need to focus on? And I said advising, because it's it's something so critical to the students. It's not just what classes they're going to take, but our students have struggles, just like every other person has struggles, we work towards finding a resolution for them, what's best for them, what fits their schedule, what's going on in their personal lives, and how I can guide them and give them direction towards if they need to find employment. We've got contacts in the community, spent years working in healthcare in our community in North Louisiana and all over the state, call upon those resources and anything we can do to help the students during that advising process, if they need us to run you know, work with them on financial assistance, on their scholarships, on tuition assistance, but it was just such an honor. And the fact that it's the students that votes that voted for that award, that is just, I mean, I was in complete shock. I was going up against some really, really prominent people in the in our university. Patrick was on our leadership team, and he was one of the ones who was one of the very first to congratulate me, so I was very pleased and honored to have that well again.

Gavin Kelly

Congratulations. Thank you. Congratulations. Well deserved. I think anyone who knows you knows that. So let's discuss you a little bit. Let's get to know you a little bit better. Okay, you're very you're ever loyal be through and through as ever will be as they come. Talk to me about kind of the origin story of that. Talk to me about growing up and deciding on your education, and walk us through that.

Joanna Ward

Okay, well, as a small child, I was one of the my family were. I come from a long line of Bulldogs. And as a small child, I grew up in Joe a stadium on Saturday nights watching Terry Bradshaw and Larry Anderson and Mike barber and all of the Super Bowl winners play. So I have been a bulldog through and through. In fact, I carry a picture around of me in a tech sweatshirt when I was probably two or three years old at my grandparents' store. So I actually was walking through the alumni walk yesterday, and my very first family member graduated in 1923 aunt Rila. And so I messaged my other family members that are still alive. Aunt rila's, of course, no longer with us. And I was like, does anybody know what Aunt Rila majored in in 1923 and then I had another great aunt who was 1925 so that started a long line of Bulldog of Bulldog alumni in our family. When I got here, I was going to major in nursing. I was going to be a flight nurse, and I pledged a sorority. I got involved. I listened to my cousins and all of those who came before me and my parents, and they were like, you get out of college, what you put into it. And that's what I try to share to my students when I'm teaching that FYE class, get involved. So they did that for me. So I took them to heart. I got involved. I got involved in intramurals. I got involved in in sororities, and I was having such a wonderful time. At the end of my first year, it was time I'd taken all of my little general education requirements, and then it was time to go into the nursing classes. And they were like, well, then at the end of the second year, you could go on to Northwestern and complete and. I was like, Well, I'm having so much fun. I want to say I was having a blast. I wanted to stay at Louisiana Tech. So I was like, Yeah, I'm not going to do that. So I had a family member who was doing very well, a first cousin who was Kathy, who was doing exceptionally well in health care, and she had a degree from Medical Records Administration, if that's what we were known as at that time, and I changed my major, and that set me on a very successful career path.

Gavin Kelly

Okay, so tell us a little bit about so we good point to talk about health informatics and information management, as it's called. Now, talk to us a little bit about what that even entails. What kind of program is that? What? What what does that sort of result in, and how does that affect the industry? Okay,

Joanna Ward

so we are a professional degree program. We are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of health informatics and information management programs. And our profession has evolved so much from when I started in the profession, everything was paper, then we've gone from paper through the American Recovery Reinvestment Act to electronic health records. How it has changed. We are we've gone from being, you know, keepers of documents to builders of databases that go into the electronic health record. We are the ones who work with the physicians and the clinicians on the training and the development on how to use the EHR there's big EHR companies out there. They hire Systems Analysis our graduates can are certainly able to work in that field. So when Dr Lou Stebbins Davis, she was Lou Stebbins at the time, when she founded this program in 1972 it was all paper. Now it's there's still some

of the information is retained on paper, but there is an electronic way to get that actually into the EHR. What do we do? We build the databases, we build the actual EHR designs and work with the implementation team to get it in place. We do the training and development. We take the raw data that is in there, turn that into information, and give it to the decision makers. For example, statistics, most people don't realize, or maybe they do health care. You've got an operation statistic. So for staffing, budgeting, revenue, it's such a large financial part of our economy nationwide. So there are individuals like myself at the hospitals who are capturing those mortality rates, who are capturing those infection control rates, who are capturing those C section rates, and that goes in and benchmarks your organization against other organizations, and then your reimbursement is decided upon that. So we're kind of like the truly the business side of health care, and we work on the revenue side of health care. We don't actually provide patient care, but we have a direct impact on patient care because of the EHR that we're building. We're the ones who make sure the physicians and the clinicians, allied health professionals are meeting the documentation standards for the regulatory agencies so our students learn an assortment of how to handle subpoenas, lawsuits. That's part of our area, risk management, quality improvement, preparing for those regulatory surveys, preparing for those centers for Medicare and Medicaid validation surveys. And that may sound like Greek to a lot, but when you're out in an organization and you see that surveyor coming, we're the one. We're going to be the first person in the organization besides the CEO, that they ask for because we're the ones who have all of the data to say, Okay, here's all the patients we had at this time period. Great. Somebody open up the EHR on these particular five patients. So that's kind of in a nutshell how our profession has evolved. Gone are the days where we used to sit there and put the charts in order paper wise, now it's already automatically. Each department has their own EHR component, and if there is a paper document, it can be scanned in and indexed into the correct location behind the right tab to make sure we don't lose any protected health information. Another area where we have really advanced is compliance and privacy. Most of your privacy officers in the organization, we had the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act that came out in 1996 and it mandated that hospitals put privacy and security standards in place to protect the health information of the patients. We're the ones who perform those investigations. The audit trails, access to the EHR, not every employee in the organization has the same level of access. Access a nurse doesn't need the same level of access as, say, an ICD 10 H I M coder. That H I M coder doesn't need the same level of access as a radiology tech. So we work with human resources and it in the organization. We don't just get to stay in our silo. We get out and we're kind of a service oriented organism, department for the organization, work with all of the various healthcare entities, radiology lab or all the physicians, nurses, etc,

Gavin Kelly

yeah. And so as the profession and even the program has evolved, how has your career evolved from that moment that you graduated? Walk us through that.

Joanna Ward

How my career well, my very first job, I was an inpatient coder in a for profit healthcare facility. Okay, where was that? That was at North Monroe hospitals, HCA, North Monroe hospital. And HCA is one of the big for profit healthcare providers in our nation. And just like most, that was just a an entry level job, I was fortunate to get that job while I was doing my professional practice. Our students do an internship their last quarter, and the majority of our students do gain employment while they're on their their final

internship, just as I did. And I took that and that, I used it as a building block, the same approach that was given to me when I came to school. You get out of it, what you put into it. My very first boss was a nurse. She was from New York, and she said, Let me tell you, you're going to learn more under me than you will under someone else. She said, Because I'm going to make sure you do that. And she did. She took me to committee meetings with her, and she really exposed me as a very young, 19 year old college or 20 year old college graduate. She took me out and started the foundation. I left there and went into a management role at the facility. It was Lincoln General Hospital at the time. Here it's now northern Louisiana Medical Center. A very good friend and avid supporter of the university and I got into management there. Dr Lou Stebbins called me and said, Would you be interested in coming to Louisiana Tech as a clinical site coordinator and being the one who schedules the students for their professional practice. Well, the greatest honor someone can get is to be asked to come back to their alma mater. And I was honored. And so I immediately said yes, and I came back at that time, and I was an instructor I worked on. She said, now you've got to get your master's great. Got my master's College of Education, industrial organizational psychology started there, and I stayed here about five years. And Dr Angela Kennedy, who was came to be the program director, was actually at HCA Highland Hospital in Shreveport, and she needed a summer worker, summer coder. I went over there and fell in love with the place, and I ended up leaving, and I was asked to take on the ownership of being the department director for the Health Information Management Department with HCA Highland. It was eventually purchased by Christus health, and my career took off at that I would say there's a point in everyone's life where you think I have arrived. That was when I felt like I had truly arrived. That was my first experience with faith based healthcare. I will tell you, there is a big difference between not in how you deliver the care, but just in the approach that the organization takes with its employees and with its providers. I spent five or about six years in a role as the system director, and I had five hospitals, so I had, like, at one point, I had 114 employees. So we would have fun little team building, you get 114 people together at five facilities, we had fun little team building exercises, you know, games and whatnot. But the exposure that I learned, because, again, you're not just in your silo there, when you've got five organizations and five departments that you're responsible for, you don't just sit in your office, you're out, you're learning. And one of the things that my mentor, I had the privilege of going through the Leadership Academy with Christus health and my mentor was the senior vice president of ethics and integrity for Catholic for the Catholic healthcare organization, and she told me, she said, look, you've got to you can't stay in your silo. You got to get out. Get to know your staff. Start building your social capital. And that's what I tell my leadership students. Now, build your social capital. Hospital, and I spent the first two weeks writing thank you notes. So I learned, and she expressed why it was so important. And I thought, why am I sitting here writing thank you notes? I've got other projects I need to be working on, but what she was teaching me is it's very important when, when we may not be able to monetarily thank someone for their service, or thank them monetarily for helping us out. A handwritten thank you note goes an immensely long way towards showing your appreciation. And I think that's one of the things that our organization does really well. I always get thank you notes from the foundation and thank you notes from our college, and I think that's fabulous. And I spent probably six years in Catholic healthcare, and then a senior leadership position came open at a for profit facility. So back into for profit world in Shreveport bossier, and I spent about five years there, as the chief operations officer, they let me do everything except drive a forklift, and I could not do that because I wasn't certified to drive the forklift. But the one thing I learned about that of all the time I spent at that organization, the diversity I had always only supervised health information Maddox and information management or

revenue cycle. You go into a senior leadership role. You need to know plant operations. You need to know security. You need to know environmental services. I had to go and learn we're up on the roof after a tornado, inspecting the mechanical, the electrical, the plumbing, making sure we don't have anything any issues. That was a huge learning experience for me and I, and how I got back to Louisiana, tech,

Joanna Ward

my organization filed bankruptcy, okay, and my organization closed. It was owned by a group of investors from Texas. So that was a learning experience, another learning experience, you don't just shutter the doors of a hospital and move on. There's regulatory requirements you have to follow. So that was some somewhat of a traumatic event. One day the employees come to work. The next day, the employees come to work, and there's chains on the doors and they're signed this saying, and security is meeting us out in the parking lot. From there, I went to another for profit healthcare Corporation, community health systems, and spent five or six years with that organization. It was in South Louisiana I yearned to return to North Louisiana. Had to get back above the Alexandria cut off. Wanted to come back home. That was my first experience living outside of northern Louisiana. Had a great social support system there. However, I yearn to come back home a position in training and development with Franciscan Missionaries, Our Lady health system, so Our Lady of the Lake St Francis Medical Center. That position came open for training, and they were just going up on their new epic EHR. So it was a perfect blend of using my skills and background with electronic health records, we had already done that with Christus health, so I was able to provide great insight and work with training and developing all of the patient access and registration staff. And my time commitment there ended and I didn't know what I was going to do. I was at a crossroads in my career. Here I was back in northern Louisiana, and my family were saying, you know, you loved it when you taught at Louisiana Tech. You loved being in college. Why don't you go back? And I was like, I'm just not sure I want to do that. And so I just kept thinking about it, and I would apply for these other jobs, senior leadership jobs, and I wouldn't get chosen. And then there was a reason I didn't get chosen, because one day, I opened up my iPad, and the very top job that popped up in my interest bank was an assistant professor of health informatics and information management at Louisiana Tech, and it said, please contact JAN C fuller for information about applying for this job. Well, when I was here the first time in 1993 Jan was one of my coworkers, so I picked up the phone and I called her, and I was like, Jan, can I come home? Yeah, because to me, this is home, and that was September of 2018, and when I she, well, actually, I called her in June. She and Michelle Martin, our current department head, were at assembly on education in Indianapolis. And Jan called me back and she said, look. Uh, let's do an interview. Can you have a presentation ready next week? And I was like, absolutely. And so I came and met with the team, did my interview very next week, came and met with Dr Kennedy, and that's how I ended up back here. And I could not be more happy. Oh, it is just to say it's a family atmosphere. It's a family atmosphere. To me, it's home. I walk around every day we have a gorgeous campus. I get out, I go, I see all the things that are new on campus. And there's not a day where I actually felt like I was coming to work. And every day I do come to work, I feel like I'm making a difference, and that, to me, is super important. I'm impacting people's lives, not just the students lives, but those students who are going to go on and work for organizations. We are impacting their lives as well.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, that's what I mean when I say that you're as ever loyalty as they come. You know, because it's you don't you don't have a bad thing to say about this university. And the people who know you and know how you operate here, only have good things to say about you. So

Joanna Ward

that's very kind.

Gavin Kelly

Thank you for sharing your story or career history there. Let's talk a little bit more about health informatics. You mentioned before we started recording there's a particular sort of partnership that you wanted to highlight worth mentioning, absolutely.

Joanna Ward

21 2021 we were approached by Mr. Jim Davison and his company beta flicks, who is one of our tenants in tech. Point right? And we partnered. They were looking for a partner. They had two PhDs, saj and Sri, that's how I know them, as Saj and Sri, and they created and did all of the visual virtual reality training simulations for us, but they needed people with healthcare guidance and teaching experience to be the deliverer of their content, and so it was the ideal partnership. So we worked with them on a grant through the Health Resources, Services Administration, and we were able to bring in \$3 million to the university through research. It's \$600,000 for five years. And every year we've started out with 30 it starts in August. And right now we've got, we started out with 30 students in that cohort. It is has evolved into an undergraduate certificate program in rural health, administrative support, and what better to serve our community and give back to our community than through a workforce training grant? We are in rural North Louisiana, so we get candidates from Union parish, Lincoln parish, Morehouse parish, Bienville parish, Claiborne parish, Red River parish, we've got candidates down in wind parish that we are going to so we are able to the students. It's a collaboration between Boshier parish community college. They take the first there's 18 semester credit hours, six classes, and they take the first three classes taught through Boshier parish community college, and then my role is the admissions specialist. Lia almost said, physician liaison, the educational liaison. I'm kind of the face that gets them acclimated, gets them set up at Boshier parish community college, and then about halfway through our winter quarter. They transfer to or what we would be, they transfer over to Louisiana Tech, and they begin the three courses at Louisiana Tech, and then they finish the program in May, and they have a beautiful undergraduate certificate that looks just like a diploma. Comes in the blue portfolio has our logo on their presidential seal and our university seal signed by the President, and it's just a very rewarding program. And the financial impact these once these candidates complete, they're able to get jobs in rural healthcare, or they're able to advance at their existing rural healthcare organization in any type of administrative support role, and so we're very proud of that. As I mentioned, we've got about 30 students in it that we start out with 30. There's been a few life happens, and people have to withdraw understand that, just like students coming here. But it's a very much a positive and very much something that the community is very supportive of. Recently, we held our I'm president of the North Louisiana Health Information Management Association, and so we were able to host it here and showcase our university part of that. Professional Service. Love it. So we anytime we can showcase our university and our department, we like to do that in our volunteering roles. And so we had about 50 attendees face to face. We held it over our beautiful Davison athletic complex, and then had another 70

participants virtually, and one of our alumni, Ms Patty Harper, who is certified rural health educator and trainer and also a Health Information Technology Trainer, was our guest speaker for that day. And so it was an excellent continuing education opportunity that our participants were able to attend free and communities of interest. So getting our name out there, getting the program out there, and again, showcasing our beautiful universe, yeah,

Gavin Kelly

always big. And also, I've learned in talking to several guests over the course of this podcast that the university has a lot of those partnerships, and those partners are kind of more than happy to kind of operate behind the scenes. They don't really clamor for recognition. You know, they're happy to support the university and the programs here. The programs here. They don't really need, you know, a spotlight on them when they do it, but it's always good to sort of give them their kudos when they deserve it. Right? That

Joanna Ward

is correct, absolutely. And our the guys at beta flicks, saj and Sri, they are phenomenal and and the actual VR goggles, a lot of the the last set of assignments are done with VR goggles. So that's to for them to create a physician office simulation and a rural healthcare setting simulation. Yeah, and for the student, the the can't grant candidates to be able to participate in that yes, it is nice to have to give them their acknowledgements? Yes.

Gavin Kelly

So this may be a bit of a loaded question, but I got one more question for you before you go. You know, we talk so much about kind of the growth of the program, the department, the college, the university, talk a little bit about the future, and maybe it can be kind of just what your hopes and goals are for the future of the program, the department. What do you kind of have in mind moving forward, maybe in the short term, maybe in the long term. What are you thinking

Joanna Ward

we are looking at? We have an online and a face to face program. One of our big collaborations right now is we teach three classes in the RN to BSN online program. I actually teach two of those team teaching research with Dr Patty McFadden, and she and I, and I was I was sharing with her that I was going to be on your podcast today. And so one of the things we want to look at is changing the way we deliver our online component, making it more engaging, making it more interactive and making it more asynchronous than it already is. Also, we have looked at another type of certificate. Can't really, can't really share much more about that right now. But we also have a master's in health informatics program. I teach at graduate school in the summertime, and we recently have, we have already have one graduate certificate in health sciences that's out there. We recently had another graduate certificate that was just approved by the Board of Regents. In fact, it hasn't even made it out on our website yet. So we're our enrollment in our graduate program has grown. We have created an intro to health care class that I was a student athlete here at Louisiana Tech. I played on the golf team. Now we no longer have a women's golf team, but when I was a student, we had a women's golf team, but we did this for all of our students who are in other majors to just come and say, Hey, this is all the opportunities you have in healthcare. And so what we did when actually, Michelle Martin created the class, along with

guidance from the other faculty members, but we talk about each type of career that someone can go into, whether they're majoring in kinesiology, biomedical engineering, nursing, audiology, speech pathology and audiology. Recently, Communication Disorders and Sciences recently joined our college, so we have guest lectures come in, and it's a great opportunity for the students to hear, Hey, okay, I can do that. I didn't realize that was available to me. We use it in FYE. I talk to them in FYE because I do teach an FYE class for the College of Applied and natural sciences, and we bring in a lot of the opportunities in healthcare, because I have a diverse background. In my class this quarter, have a lot of nutrition and dietetic students, and those are critical I learned a lot. Dr Simone camel came and spoke to my class. So we've got a lot of things that we're working on. Where are we headed? Growth wise, I see our profession continuing to evolve. A lot of our workers are remote. A. Um, so that brings in a challenge of remote workforce management. So when we're doing our in class assignments, our we incorporate real world scenarios. So we have our professional association, which gives us and our accrediting body, which our organization is one that I can pick up the phone and call a colleague at Washington State University and say, Hey, how are you meeting this standard? And Patty's gonna help me out and tell me how she's meeting it. I can pick it up even at ull. I can pick up the phone and call our colleagues at University of Louisiana and ask them, How are you guys meeting this down here? Just direction, yeah, but it's continuing to grow, and I see it evolving even more, more on the systems analysis side, more on the actual design and implementation. We recently have hired a new faculty member at the undergraduate who specializes in data analytics, and she's already reached out to a couple of our community healthcare providers about partnering and us doing some data collection. And we have a need in our community with the social determinants of health we have an elderly population and helping them get access to the things that they need, but we first need to collect some data and see where do we need to start? And so Dr Jackie white at Lincoln health hut and helping us get started in what they need and how we can be a service to them.

Gavin Kelly

Yeah, that's just as a larger sort of thing to tell you. It's, it's, it's easy to listen to listen to you talk about the program and talk about tech and get fired up, so you speak about it with a sense of passion and the investment. And we can tell you're invested in this university and in the students that you teach, that you advise. Obviously, it's an award winning process for you. Joanna, it's been great talking to you. I appreciate you making time for the podcast for us. Thank you for all you do here at Louisiana Tech. Thank you for continuing to be a part of the mission here and yeah, just just keep at it, because it's great. Having you around is great.

Joanna Ward

Thank you, Gavin, and I appreciate working with you.

Gavin Kelly

Go Dogs.

Joanna Ward

Go Dogs.

Gavin Kelly

Thank you for listening to Beyond 1894. Please subscribe and rate us wherever you listen to podcasts. For more information about this episode, you can check out our show notes. Beyond 1894 is produced by Louisiana Tech University's Office of University Communications.